

Upper Tanana language

Upper Tanana (also known as **Tabesna** or **Nabesna**) is an endangered Athabaskan language spoken in eastern Interior Alaska, United States, mainly in the villages of Northway, Tetlin, and Tok, and adjacent areas of the Canadian province of Yukon. In 2000 there were fewer than 100 speakers, and the language was no longer being acquired by children.

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Overview

Upper Tanana shows near mutual-intelligibility with neighboring Tanacross but differs in several phonological features. In particular, Upper Tanana has low tone as a reflex of Proto-Athabaskan constriction, where Tanacross has high tone. Upper Tanana also has an extra vowel phoneme and has developed diphthongs through loss of final consonants.

Traditionally, five main dialects have been recognized.

The main Upper Tanana speaking communities today are located in the Alaskan communities of Northway and Tetlin and in the Canadian community of Beaver Creek.

Name

There are actually two Tanana languages, the first being Lower Tanana, or Minto, and the second being Upper Tanana, or Nabesna. The original name for the Upper Tanana language was **Nee'aaneegn'**.

Upper Tanana	
<i>Nee 'aandeegn'</i>	
Native to	United States
Region	Alaska (upper Tanana River
Ethnicity	ca. 340 Tanana (1997–2007) ^[1]
Native speakers	ca. 110 (1997–2007) ^[1]
Language family	<div>Dené–Yeniseian? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Na-Dené<ul style="list-style-type: none">Athabaskan<ul style="list-style-type: none">Northern Athabaskan<ul style="list-style-type: none">Upper Tanana</div>
Writing system	Latin (Northern Athabaskan alphabet)
Official status	
Official language in	 Alaska ^[2]
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	tau
Glottolog	uppe1437 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/uppe1437) ^[3]

Language today

As of the beginning of the 21st century, roughly 100 people still speak the language. The demographic make up of the Upper Tanana speakers are above the age 60. The language is no longer taught to children of this current generation, therefore, the extinction of Upper Tanana is in the near future. In the 1960s, Paul G. Milanowski and Alfred John worked together to establish a writing system to produce several booklets and school dictionaries to assist in bilingual programs.

Geography

Upper Tanana is the eastern part of Alaska that also shares the same location as the speakers of the Tanacross Language. This location reaches from the Wrangell Mountain range across to Joseph Creek, and west of the Tanana rivers. The Tanana Rivers divides this area through a string of smaller rivers and creeks. Upper Tanana is mainly spoken in Tetlin and Northway.

Dialects

Upper Tanana is categorised into five separate dialects. The first dialect is spoken by the Tetlin band, which has up to 20 known speakers. The other four dialect are spoken by the smaller bands that are located more upriver. The first is Nabesna with two known speakers, the second dialect is Northway with 20 known speakers, the third dialect is Scottie Creek which no longer has any known speakers, and the last is Beaver Creek dialect has one known speaker, but there is a high potential for a few more.

Official status

No countries have Upper Tanana as their official language. The state of Alaska recognized Upper Tanana, along with 19 other native Alaskan languages, as one of the official languages of the state in 2014.

Phonology

The Upper Tanana writing system consists of 13 vowels, 34 consonants, and five tones.

Consonants

		<u>Bilabial</u>	<u>Dental</u>	<u>Alveolar</u>		<u>Post-alveolar</u>		<u>Palatal</u>	<u>Velar</u>	<u>Glottal</u>
				central	lateral	plain	pal.			
<u>Plosive</u>	plain	p		t					k	ʔ
	aspirated			tʰ					kʰ	
	ejective			tʼ					kʼ	
<u>Affricate</u>	plain		tθ	ts	tɬ	tʃ				
	aspirated		tθʰ	tsʰ	tɬʰ	tʃʰ				
	ejective		tθʼ	tsʼ	tɬʼ	tʃʼ				
<u>Fricative</u>	voiceless		θ	s	ɬ	ʃ	ʃʲ	ç	x	h
	voiced		ð							
<u>Nasal</u>	voiced	m		n						
	voiceless			ɲ						
<u>Approximant</u>					l			j		

Vowels

	<u>Front</u>	<u>Central</u>	<u>Back</u>	
<u>Close</u>	i iː		u uː	
<u>Mid</u>	e eː	ə əː	ʌ	o oː
<u>Open</u>		a aː		

Tone

The Upper Tanana has a range of five separate tones.

Tone	Vowel	Example	Meaning
low tone	e	nen	you
high tone	é	nén'	land
falling tone	ê	jêg	berries
rising tone	ě	ts'ěd'	blanket
extra-high tone	ǒ	ch'ekǒl	n/a

Vocabulary/Lexis

Examples of words translated from English to Upper Tanana.

English	Upper Tanana
Bear	sh'oo
Berry	Jign
Bunny	Gah
Dog	łii
Salmon	łuuk

External links

- Yukon Native Language Centre - Upper Tanana (<http://www.ynlc.ca/languages/ut/ut.html>)
- Alaska Native Language Center (<http://www.uaf.edu/anlc/langs/ut.html>)
- Upper Tanana basic lexicon at the Global Lexicostatistical Database (<http://starling.rinet.ru/cgi-bin/response.cgi?root=new100&morpho=0&basename=new100\nde\pca&limit=-1>)

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Dictionaries

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